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2 Exploring a Faith-Led Open-Systems Perspective of Stewardship 3 in Family Businesses

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Received: 6 November 2018 / Accepted: 4 December 2019

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to examine how faith-led practices in family firms affect organizational stewardship. Current studies highlight the relevance of religious adherence for family businesses, yet provide limited understanding of how this shapes the key traits of these organizations. Drawing on six autobiographies of family business leaders who openly express their adherence to their faith, and adopting an open-systems analysis of these autobiographies, we demonstrate that faith-led values influence organizational and leadership practices. Overall, our study suggests that the influence of religious beliefs in the organizational practices of family businesses have greater repercussions than previously thought. By introducing a faith-led approach to stewardship, we enrich the theoretical discussion around stewardship and the relevance of religion in family business.

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Keywords Spiritual open-systems · Stewardship · Family business · Organizational practices · Extended kinship network · Faith-led business

18 Introduction stewardship climate than their non-family counterparts, fostering employee engagement with policies, practices, and

The role of religion as one dimension of stewardship relies procedures, adopting pro-organizational values (Neubaum 2034

“very much on personal characteristics such as values, honesty, and generosity, sacrifice, and discipline” (Le Breton-Miller et al. 2017), and affecting the governance of these firms’ identity, and Miller 2018, p. 233), influencing multiple areas of the family businesses are a unique context characterized by family business. Stewardship theory assumes a relationship—the co-existence of individual, family, and business systems—based system with a focus on non-financial goals, individual (Kepner 1983; Habbershon et al. 2003; Litz 2008; Astrachan 2539

also serving the organizational good (Davis et al. 1997), the 2010 in which the daily enactment of work and home are 2640 intrinsic desire to pursue collective goals, and relying on often “inextricably intertwined” (Aldrich and Clif 2003; 2741 trust as a control mechanism (Madison et al. 2016). Recent Hamilton 2006; Fletcher 2010). Traditionally, the influence 2842

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studies argue that stewardship in business can serve as an of religion is linked to aspects of ethical and moral deci2943
organizing mechanism (Hernandez 2008; Segal and Lehrer sion-making in the business in which individuals with strong 3044
2012). Family businesses are found to have a stronger faith-led behaviours hold a position of influence (Weaver
and Agle 2002). Yet, while extensive research has hinted 45 at the

importance of religion in family irms, we still know 46 A1 **Electronic supplementary material** The online version of this little about how and why
article (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04387-2>) contains
supplementary material, which is available to authorized users.
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organizational practices in family 47 56 Litz 2008; Pieper and Klein
2007). We argue that an open- value, identity and long-term commitment to their irm, 106
systems methodology, enabling a wider but more detailed enhanced personal reputation through stewardship activities,
107
analysis of each subsystem, allows describing how religious and more likely to be inherently moral as a result of shared 108
faith can shape organizational practices (Smith-Acuña 2011) cultural values and religious convictions. Thus, family busi- 109
and theorizing on its influence on stewardship. nesses are an ideal context to examine the integration of faith 110 61 Due to the
exploratory nature of this study, we address a under a stewardship lens. 111
broad research question: *How do faith-led practices in fam- The stewardship perspective recognizes that family busi- 112
ily firms affect organizational stewardship?* We draw on an ness owners and managers are not always self-serving but 113
open-systems framework to help us interpret written auto- align their goals and motivations with those they serve in 114
biographies. Recent research has advocated autobiography the whole organization (Davis et al. 2010). Such perspective 115
as a source of insights that enable advancing understanding suggests that leaders may develop organizational practices 116
of family irms over time (Hjorth and Dawson 2016). Thus, that beneit the family irm when policies foster stewardship 117
we empirically draw on six family businesses and their auto- behaviours (Zahra et al. 2008; James et al. 2017). It could 118
biographies: Ouimet (Ouimet and Semen 2013), Cardone be argued that committed family leaders and non-family 119
(Cardone 2009), Chick-il-A (Cathy 2007), Interstate Batter employees can achieve this by engaging in constant and 120
ies (Miller and Hosier 1996), Hobby Lobby (Green and Mer positive interactions framed in faith. 121
rill 2010), and Mary Kay (Ash and Pendleton 2008). The In this regard, Neubaum et al. (2017, p. 38) introduced 122
selected autobiographies help to illustrate how faith shapes the stewardship climate perspective as “the extent to which 123
organizational practices in family business and therefore individuals perceive that their irm’s policies, practices, and 124
stewardship. procedures foster stewardship behaviours and stewardship 125
Our study thus contributes to scholarship by unveiling values, which are widely shared across the organization”. 126
how faith affects stewardship in family businesses. Con- The central tenets of stewardship climate are that organi- 127
ceptualizing stewardship from the perspective of individu zations relect the leader’s values, and that steward lead- 128
als involved in the family business (Davis et al. 2010), our ers will design and govern their irms to elicit stewardship 129
study extends and complements earlier research framing behaviours from others within the organization. Exchanges 130
stewardship in the psychological and sociological perspec between family business stewards and individuals achieve 131 82
tives (Henssen et al. 2014; Hernandez 2012; Wade-Benzoni this by creating a situation of reciprocal stewardship that 132
et al. 2008). permeates the organization (Neubaum et al. 2017, p. 38). 133
The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We Family businesses with a stewardship climate emphasize 134
irst discuss stewardship and religion in the family business intrinsic motivation, organizational identiication, use of per- 135

context, then introduce the systems perspective to investigate and 136

the organizational practices of faith-led leaders in family 137 involvement orientation. Neubaum et al. (2017) demonstrate

businesses. We then explain the methodology, discuss our 138 that family businesses have a stronger stewardship climate

findings, describe a faith-led family systems model and its 139 than non-family firms, suggesting that their benefits are real-

implications for stewardship theory. Last, we offer our con- 140 ized in the policies, practices, and procedures that promote

clusions and suggest some future research avenues. sharing the stewardship values across the organization. 141

Neubaum et al. (2017) call for studies to explore the 142 extent

to which family firms are likely to be inherently 143 92 **Stewardship and Religion in the Family** moral or inclined to remain

within the boundaries of moral 144

93 Business Context

behaviour as a result of their shared religious convictions. 145

Inspired by Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2018) and Dis- 146 94

Family businesses are the heartbeat of the global economy cua Cruz (2013, 2018), we observe that among the many 147

and are currently the predominant organizational form 148 dimensions that affect stewardship, religion has the capac-

around the world (Melin et al. 2014). Researchers agree 149 ity to encourage the behaviour associated with stewardship

AQ4 that one of the key characteristics of family business is that 150 benefits by fostering honesty and trust, and reducing agency

family and business objectives are often difficult to sepa- 151 costs. This distinction is based on studies exploring steward-

rate (Astrachan 2003, 2010; Fletcher 2002; Hamilton 2013). ship theory (Davis et al. 1997), and stewardship behaviour 152

Recent studies contend that stewardship practices and behav- 153 arising from the values, beliefs, and sentiments of

business 154

iours are more likely to be evident in family than non-family 155 leaders (Hernandez 2008, 2012) in family business (Davis

firms (Neubaum et al. 2017; Madison et al. 2016; Dodd and 156 et al. 2010; Neubaum et al. 2017).

Dyck 2015). Dodd and Dyck (2015) argue that family firms 157 The stewardship concept is not disconnected from Chris-

may place greater emphasis on stewardship due to their 158 tian literature, pointing towards the “balancing of interests”

interpersonal relationships, relational and socioemotional 159 of responsibility to God and to fellow man (Rossouw 1994).

159 A Christian perspective of stewardship in family firms calls 209 many of the key decision-makers have a strong faith-based

on the owners to look at the business and everything in 210 set of values, and see working in a faith-led organization as

it from God’s perspective according to Biblical scripture 211 an opportunity to apply these values consistently (Weaver

(Joshua 24: 15; Leviticus 25: 23; Psalms 50: 10–12; Haggai 212 and Agle 2002). This would naturally apply to the way the

2: 8; Ecclesiastes 5: 19; James 1: 17, NRSV). In this per- 213 business operates and how it perceives relationships (Mabey

spective, Christians are stewards of the committed resources 214 et al. 2017; Discua Cruz 2015). These previously

explored 215

by the legitimacy and authority of God (Caferky 2012), thus 216 concepts (Lynn and Wallace 2001) underscore that those in

devising organizational practices to ensure the wellbeing of 217 control of a family business may frame pro-organizational

everyone and everything in order to honour God (Deuter- 218 practices in an idiosyncratic, relational way. However, addi-

onomy 6: 5, 10: 1; Psalm 22: 23 | Isaiah 42: 12; Luke 12: 219 tional empirical evidence is needed to show how such prac-

42-48; Ephesians 4: 28). tices shape family-owned businesses. 220

To believers, God is a legitimate and authoritative guide 221 To investigate the issues related to diverse yet intercon-

for behaviour, and an important stakeholder in the decisions 222 nected organizational practices within family

businesses, 223

made for the firm, its operations, and practices (Schwartz 224 scholars commonly use a systems perspective. The sys-

2006), thus adopting organizational practices that make 225 tem theorists Ludwig von Bertalanffy suggested, “in order

them accountable for their actions to God and the larger 226 to understand an organized whole we must know both the

community (Discua Cruz 2015). This suggests an emphasis 227 parts and the relations between them” (Bertalanffy 1972, p.

on servant-like leadership, trust, and vocation (Smith 2005; 411). Whilst generally applied to family therapy, systems 228

Rossouw 1994; Caferky 2012), and the relevance of a sys- theory has more recently been adopted by family business 229

tems view in the stewardship perspective (Neubaum et al. scholars to explore many aspects and key features of family 230

179 2017).

businesses (Kepner 1983), including organizational culture 229
(Martins and Terblanche 2003), relational communication 230
(Schlippe and Frank 2013), and wealth creation (Habbershon 231

180 A Systems Perspective on Organizational

et al. 2003). 232

181 **Practices of Faith-Led Family Businesses** Kepner (1983) highlights the importance of developing 233 our understanding of
the interaction between the family sub- 234 182 A key feature of family businesses is that they select the idi- system and the firm's
development. Building on this per- 235

183 osyncratic views of families that often have religious beliefs 236
237

184 that may influence the organizational context, and hence the 238
185 way the firm operates or pursues its objectives over time 239

186 (Paterson et al. 2013). Family businesses must develop 240
187 practices that allow members to work together to achieve 241

188 their goals and objectives, and interact with external actors. 242
189 Compared to other types of firms, family businesses may 243

190 derive their organizational practices from the interaction 244
191 between the family and the business subsystems (Kepner 245

192 1983). Organizational practices express the way businesses 246
193 pursue their objectives, the shared routines and knowledge 247

194 that support the provision of products and services, allowing 248
195 the members to meet their customers' needs (Beatson et al. 249

196 2008). The long-term perspective that tends to characterize 250
197 family firms encourages the development of organizational 251

198 practices as part of a survival strategy implicitly influenced 252
199 by the values, objectives, and beliefs held by family mem- 253

200 bers (Lumpkin and Brigham 2011; Sorenson 2013). (Pieper and Klein 2007, p. 306). Third, *ownership* struc- 254

201 Several studies have identified and lauded the existence 255
202 of Christian owned and operated businesses (Chan-Serain 256

203 et al. 2012; Wong et al. 2018). One of the most comprehen- 257
204 sive definitions of a business that aims to uphold the Chris- 258

205 tian faith is one that "declare[s] their belief in, and active 259
206 pursuit of, the successful merging of biblical principles 260

207 with business activities" (Ibrahim and Angelidis 2005, p. 261
208 187). A Christian emphasis in organizations may imply that 262

262 investigate how the faith-centred stewardship perspective 263
263 of an individual leader affects the business structure and 264

264 practices. We consider this in the context of the environment 265
265 in which the family business exists and operates, drawing 266

266 on the perspective of God as the managerial stakeholder 267
267 or ultimate CEO (Schwartz 2006, p. 292). We argue that 268

268 the individual's belief in the family as part of the family of 269
269 God is embedded in the family subsystem. Consequently, 270

270 a faith-led family approach influences the organizational 271
271 behaviours and structures of the day-to-day stewardship of mindful of the interpretation limitations associated with 320

272 faith-led family businesses. 321

272 social desirability and the influence on the nature of the 321

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Few mainstream perspectives adopt such a nuanced method to understand the complex layers of a family business system influenced by faith-led stewardship behaviours and relationships. This is especially important when examining the influence that faith has on the owner-manager, and consequently the way in which the family business operates over time.

claims made. In sum, we borrow from Goss et al. (2011, p. 218) who state that, “any such problems are outweighed by the advantages that this material offers in terms of depth and duration”.

Sampling 326

Our sampling strategy was purposeful and intrinsically linked to our research question (Patton 2002). While numerous

ous studies consider the topic of faith and work (Gundolf and Filser 2013; Ewest 2015), less has been published on

Research Design the enactment of individual and organizational spirituality as part of stewardship in family businesses. We therefore began Seeking to capture in-depth personal data illustrating the by gathering a worldwide list of resources associated with

complex and diverse relationships between spirituality, ownership, and organizational enactment, we rely on written narratives in the form of autobiographies. Autobiographies are distinct from biographies as they rely on primary data to develop insights on the origins of ideas (Ford et al. 2003), such as the leader’s vocation, the challenges of translating this vocation into organizational practices, and the successes and failures of their approach. Autobiographies can be useful to understand family business, as they “shed light on the relational dynamics of how family and business, as well as family members, are inextricably interconnected” (Dawson and Hjorth 2012, p. 350). Following earlier work drawing on autobiographies (Dawson and Hjorth 2012), our research design enabled collecting rich, personal data from a number of individuals with different backgrounds and religious vocations.

own-the topics of religion, spirituality, and family business. One of our main concerns was identifying family businesses that were openly Christian, made their Christian faith public, and pronounced that faith was part of their leadership, managerial practices, and decision-making processes. We worked through many manuscripts distinguishing family business cases from others, which led us to identify six Christian family businesses in America.

We believe our sample of cases is appropriate due to the diversity and detailed accounts of successful and unsuccessful practices. Our cases also include an enhanced, sometimes even intimate degree of personal and deep reflections (Boyle and Parry 2007) that underpin our theoretical narrative in relation to stewardship. Finally, by presenting rich data from a diverse sample of different industries and religious backgrounds, we contribute with a conceptualization

Whilst we accept that relying on autobiographical accounts is a particular and somewhat unusual form of research design, previous studies in family business (Dawson and Hjorth 2012), entrepreneurship (Reveley 2010; Smith 2005), and leadership (Humphreys et al. 2012; Westley and Mintzberg 1989) indicate the possibility of rigour in such

design. There are, of course, limitations to using autobiographies, as they may “intentionally or unintentionally be written with an agenda or purpose in mind” (Mathias and Smith 2016, p. 208). Considering our research interest in faith-led businesses, we believe that this is an advantage, as autobiographies allow free expression of religious beliefs.

Data Collection 353

Autobiographies are the main source of our data, offering a temporal account of how individuals build and shape organizations (Mathias and Smith 2016) in openly Christian family businesses. While the autobiographies vary in length, internal organization, and range of topics, they all cover the personal and organizational journey of each family

Table 1 Sample firms and data sources

Family Business Head, Organization (industry)	Christian denomination	Key business indicators	Business practices influenced by the relationship with God	Key data sources
Michael Quimet Sr., Ouimet-Tomasso (Canned Foods)	Catholic	Ouimet-Tomasso Inc. was founded in 1989. It manufactures canned food, employing more than 1000 people. The company only had 3 losses in its history. The percentage of profits after sales is higher than any other Canadian company in the same industry	ISMA—Spirituality in Management—summarizes its practices	Ouimet and Semen (2013). Everything has been loaned to you: The biography of a transformational CEO. Staten Island, New York: St. Pauls
Michael Cardone Sr., Cardone Industries (Remanufacturing of car parts)	Evangelical	Cardone is the largest privately held automotive parts remanufacturing company in the world, with 10,000 employees in 19 states and 10 countries. The company has lower turnover rates, fewer work-site injuries, lower absenteeism and tardiness rates, improved ability to attract and retain talented people, high level of manufacturing quality, increased productivity and improved morale	The key underpinning practice at Cardone is the Family Program where employees are treated as part of the extended family	Cardone (2009). Business with soul: Creating a workplace rich in faith and values. Nashville: Thomas Nelson
Truett Cathy, Chick-il-A (Food retail)	Baptist	Chick-il-A is an American fast food chain specializing in chicken sandwiches and salads. It was founded in 1946 and has over 2000 restaurants, primarily in the US. Chick-il-A has been awarded the prestigious The Glassdoor Employees' Choice Award recognizing employees' benefits	There are two key practices underpinned by the relationship with God: closing on Sundays, and the link with the community around the restaurants	Cathy (2007). Eat more chicken: Inspire more people. Decatur, GA: Looking Glass Books
Norm Miller, Interstate Batteries (Battery retail)	Evangelical	Founded in 1952, this second-generation family business powers a network of 200,000 dealers. Their worldwide operation employs more than 1500 people and provides revenue in excess of 1.5 billion dollars	The Bible and its principles are central to the work teams development and supported by the work of Chaplains	Miller and Hosier (1996). Beyond the norm. Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson Publishers

Table 1 continued

Family Business Head, Organization (industry)	Christian denomination	Key business indicators	Business practices influenced by the relationship with God	Key data sources	Autobiography #pages
David Green, Hobby Lobby (Arts and Crafts retail)	Pentecostal	Started in 1972, the company has more than 3200 people working in 822 stores across the US. The company is famous for filing and winning a lawsuit against the United States in a matter that was against the values of the family	Hobby Lobby have a chaplain program and a policy to close on Sundays for prayer and family time	Green and Merrill (2010). More than a hobby: How a \$600 start-up became America's home and crafts superstore. Nashville: Thomas Nelson	224
Mary Kay Ash, (Mary Kay Cosmetics), Beauty and Cosmetic Retail	Christian (non-denominational)	Mary Kay is the largest sales network of cosmetics in the world with more than 1.5 million members worldwide. Founded in 1963 with the idea of creating a flexible job, it now boasts revenues of more than 3.5 billion US dollars	A focus on God and God's principles has made Mary Kay appealing to those who form part of the Mary Kay family	Ash and Pendleton (2008). The Mary Kay way: Timeless principles from America's greatest woman entrepreneur. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons	238

business. We analysed more than 1271 pages across the six autobiographies.

While each autobiography is different, some common themes emerged. For example, all offered detailed examples of "God-centred" organizational practices, why these emerged and made sense, and how the leaders implemented them. The process dimension is of particular interest, as it allowed us to link leaders' behaviours to the changes that occur when a family business becomes a faith-led family business system. Finally, based on the personal and selective substance of the autobiographies, we sought additional data including financial reports, workforce absenteeism, and productivity levels. This allowed examining the changes in the family business subsystems and understanding how putting God first influences stewardship.

For each case, we supplemented the autobiographies with other publicly available sources (Mathias and Smith 2016). We included company reports and manuals, published research or teaching cases, and online interviews or talks on online video platforms. This additional data (see Table 1b)¹ allowed us to contextualize each family business and deepen our understanding of their faith-led processes and practices.

Data Analysis

We adopted Dawson and Hjorth's (2012) framework to generate insights from the family business narratives. In line with their recommendations, our analytical process followed three steps. The first was *explication*, which consists of summarizing the stories after reading and re-reading the autobiographies and taking extensive notes. We did this individually over a number of months and regularly met to discuss our views of each of the six narratives. Table 2 reports the outcome of our collective analysis.

The second step was *explanation* in which we interwove our reading of the autobiographies with the spirituality and family business literature. We built on established perspectives to inform our interpretation but were mindful not to be constrained by these (Hamilton 2006). In building interpretations, each member of the team read widely and explored different theory building avenues. During this phase, additional sources of data were included to enrich the emerging insights.

The third step was *exploration* in which we came together as a team to discuss the "so what" question. As we jointly moved between theory and data, we adopted an open-systems perspective to guide our analytical work. This led to linking our work with other dimensions of the family business literature, such as ownership and management

¹ Table S1b can be found in the supplementary files attached to this paper.

Table 2 Findings and analytical categories

Open-Systems Dimension 2nd-order data categories 1st-order categories — exemplar data from autobiographies			
Business subsystem — their mandit to offering Being excellent in everything they do is paramount	My father used to say “Excellence in all things and glory to God”. It is the pursuit of excellence that drives us because that is a worthy goal in life (p. 42)	I want to be the very best competitor I can be. The Bible says, “What ever your hand do to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 9:10) (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 13)	
	Business as God’s business We have to do small, practical ways that, when added together, will make it possible to manage a company more and more in the manner of Jesus Christ (p. 103)	God first, family second and then work (Ash and Pendleton 2008, p. 4)	
	Recruitment approach based on faith We also realize the importance of taking care of the operators’ families. That is a secondary benefit of closing on Sundays. That operators and team members can count with at least one day a week devoted to family, worship and personal pursuits (p. 102)	We care about our employees—physically, emotionally, financially and spiritually (Miller and Hosier 1996, p. 189)	
Management subsystem—family and non-family members	Workers as spiritual beings All people working in the company or organization have been created by the Creator, who loves them and lives in them. This includes consumers as well. The company must serve people (p. 3)	Leadership is about responsibility, leadership is about serving and leadership is about following after God and seeking him and His will in all our lives (p. 121)	
Family subsystem — nuclear and extended kinship relationships	Creating and developing a family business A number of the Green family members are involved in Hobby Lobby. I hold them to the same performance standard as everyone else. I didn’t push anyone to join us in the first place. (p. 151)	We value our people—we are committed to the following: Every person has intrinsic value and worth; every person has a unique contribution to make to the company; all people are treated equally with dignity; an individual’s family needs will be given priority (Cardone, p. 50)	
	Communication and access between hierarchical levels	When someone enters my office to speak to me, I don’t allow anything to distract my attention ... I look directly at the person (p. ...)	
Ownership — the legal right to make decisions Change in engagement but not decision-making	Financial and public recognition for family members	Every year we would organize an event for the employees and that took a lot of planning and each time we would invite a guest speaker with a name recognition (p. 108)	
	Tommy children and grandchildren (...)	We’re still family-owned, which keeps it a whole lot simpler. When my wife and kids and I decided to make a business move, we don’t have to ask Wall Street about it (p. 196)	

(Astrachan 2010). For our analysis, we produced a coding tree illustrating each dimension of the family business system affected by the relationship with God (Table 2).¹ We began noting a temporal effect in how the relationship with God shaped stewardship in these organizations and consequently included this dimension in the coding tree (Table 3). We present our data and analytical interpretation next. meeting and my son said, ‘Dad it is not you, we are depending on God’” (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 137). As another example of his faith-led spousal support, “Barbara (my wife) tried to console me, ‘David, it’s God’s business. If He wants to take it away’” (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 183). **An Open-Systems Perspective of Faith-Led Family Businesses** In terms of the business subsystem, our data show that

the family business leaders describe how they create, shape and introduce mechanisms and practices that contribute to the spiritual development of their organizational practices. This demonstrates the influence on their business, allowing their relationship with God to take precedence in decision-making. The four dimensions of the six faith-led family businesses.

The Business Subsystem

The management subsystem highlights the importance of the structure of the management team running the family business (Pieper and Klein 2007). Our data show that family involvement is critical in developing top management teams, and features in all the autobiographies examined, highlighting the importance of family centred, faith-led values. For example, Scott Miller took over from Norm Miller at Interstate Batteries, Michael Cardone Jr. took over from Cardone Sr., Richard Rogers and Mary Kay’s son is now the Chairman. These examples demonstrate a common approach to the act of glorifying God through (our) the management subsystem to continue their work embedded in faith-led values. Servant leadership (Sendjaya et al. 2008) is for many family members an important example of how values translate into practice in these organizations. For instance, Interstate Batteries aims, “we are givers” (Miller and Hosier 1996, p. 142). Similarly, Chick-il-A staff operate on value driven transformative leadership (Caldwell et al. 2012). Sendjaya et al. (2008) state the two-fold approach of expressing their faith through service to others and cultivating a sense of meaning in the workplace for those in the management subsystem. These autobiographies illustrate how this type of leadership can apply to both family and

¹ Table 2 is complemented by Table S2b that can be found in the Supplementary files attached to this paper.

exemplifies this stating:

444 The autobiographies reveal that family business lead- non-family members. 491
445 ers resolve tensions by placing God at the centre of busi- Logically, the autobiographies advocate recruiting 492
446 ness matters. Indeed, they describe a God-led approach to non-family members with values in line with those of the 493
447 productivity, employment, commercial transactions, profit, organization. They describe how their faith-led approach 494
448 and competition, describing how tensions can be resolved, influences recruitment. Cardone, Chick-il-A, and Hobby 495
449 expressed as “giving the business to God” (Cardone 2009, p. Lobby all agree that being openly Christian allows them to 496
attract and recruit highly competent individuals to work in 497 their factories, main businesses, or franchises. Hobby Lobby 498

Table 3 Thematic interpretation of data in relation to stewardship

Open-systems dimension	Summary of patterns from data based on Table	nd-order data categories (based on Table 2)	Thematic interpretation in relation to stewardship	Dimensions of stewardship climate scale (Neubaum et al. 2017)
Business subsystem—their mand itsofering	<p>To succeed, faith-led family businesses must balance three equally important dimensions: financial, social, and spiritual. 2</p> <p>The gift to build and develop the business belongs to God. It is the role of the founder and team to give back to God what belongs to God</p>	<p>Being excellent in everything they do is a paramount</p> <p>Business as God's business As the business belongs to God there is a faith-led motivation to act as stewards and not owners</p>	<p>As these organizations adopt distinct measures of success, they in turn create a distinct faith-led identity</p> <p>Intrinsic motivation</p>	Organizational identification
Management subsystem—family and non-family members	<p>Being openly Christian impacts on the recruitment process as distinct types of people approach the organizations</p> <p>Workers are also sons and daughters of God and therefore should be treated with the same dignity as any other member of the family business</p>	<p>Recruitment approach based on faith Recruitment is based on faith-led organizational identification. Employees commonly refer to their own contacts to the organization</p> <p>Workers as spiritual beings All workers are assumed to have the same dignity and therefore they are treated collectively and involved actively in the management of the faith-led family business</p>	<p>Recruitment is based on faith-led organizational identification. Employees commonly refer to their own contacts to the organization</p> <p>Workers as spiritual beings All workers are assumed to have the same dignity and therefore they are treated collectively and involved actively in the management of the faith-led family business</p>	<p>Organizational identification; Collectivism</p> <p>Collectivism; Involvement orientation</p>
Family subsystem—nuclear and extended kinship relationships	<p>The family business develops and when the commercial, social, and spiritual dimensions develop in each person</p> <p>A very employee deserves the same dignity, they also should be treated similarly in the way communication reaches them and they participate in decision-making processes</p> <p>All members of family and non-family deserve to be publicly recognized for their efforts</p>	<p>Creating and developing a family business</p> <p>Communication and access between hierarchical levels</p> <p>Financial and public recognition for family members</p>	<p>Because every worker is spiritual being, they are invited to become part of the extended faith-led family business</p> <p>Communication and working practices between workers of the same humanness observed distinct rules of proximity and respect</p> <p>Family business deserves what their organization to continue to serve God for many generations</p>	<p>Collectivism</p> <p>Low power distribution</p> <p>Use of personal forms of power</p>
Ownership—the legal right to make decisions	<p>Whilst all members should be treated similarly in relation to communication and engagement, decision-making powers should stay within the family</p>	<p>Change in engagement but not decision-making</p>	<p>Family business deserves what their organization to continue to serve God for many generations</p>	Intrinsic motivation

Over the last few years we've been amazed to see how meal just to say hello and express, in action, not words, many top-notch, family oriented, solid productive the importance he gives to authentic communication other employees want to leave where and to each person's dignity (Ouimet and Semen 2013, 552 they are and come and work for Hobby Lobby because p. 18) we close on Sundays (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 138).

God-led family practices in relationships with non-family Such faith-related choices are crucial to selecting non-family members inspire the former to treat the latter as spiritual members for various management roles. Chick-il-A reports beings. The data highlight that a core feature of management similar results: in these faith-led organizations is the belief that all employees are made in the image of God and that through work Closing our business on Sunday, the Lord's day, is they will achieve their purpose in life. According to Cardone our way of honouring God and showing our loyalty (2009, p. 104), this approach translates into "higher quality to him... I believe God honours our decisions and sets of work, productivity, creativity, and a greater sense of per- us before unexpected opportunities to do greater work sonal significance". Treatment of others as spiritual beings for him because of our loyalty (Cathy 2007, p. 100). created by God allows family business leaders to develop to note is how these decisions affect the workers' and shape management-related initiatives that nurture indi- families and wider community. Hobby Lobby and Chick-il- vidual development and a collective purpose. A's decision to close on Sundays is a critical dimension of the organization. Hobby Lobby highlights how their employees responded to this decision: **The Family Subsystem** One store sent me a group letter 'It is with heartfelt The data also highlight the importance of ascribing a family thanks that we, the associates of #147, join the thoutemaphor to all employees. Cardone, relecting on his father sands of other associates across the states in applaudwith whom he started Cardone Industries, contextualized ing our corporate leaders for taking the bold step in this: Sunday closings. We know this is a positive step for Hobby Lobby and pray that other retailers will join us Dad's respect for other people was part of his faith. He in bringing back those things that are important in our believed strongly in loving one's neighbour as one's lives (Green and Merrill 2010, p. 136). self... He saw all people as Gods children (Cardone 2009, p. 191).

The intrinsic motivation behind these significant practices is rooted in the desire to extend a God-led approach to all. This In all the autobiographies, the narratives illustrate a unique is also observable in the way these organizations discuss relational approach to family business leadership and man- the importance of making a chaplain available to all staf, agement deeply embedded in the importance of viewing oth- from family to non-family members, to enable developing ers as members of a spiritual family (Discua Cruz 2013). their spirituality with the organization and God. Helping to Cardone exemplifies the notion of an organizational family: see others as spiritual beings, Interstate Batteries highlights ... respect every person was a lesson from my father. that chaplains are "available for 'light' counselling... and My father treated everybody that worked for him as if prepared to deal with heavy problems" (Miller and Hosier they were part of the family... there was no discrimi- nation and no regarding 'us' and 'them'... Everybody While the autobiographies mention the positive reperwas created equal in God's sight, we just have diferent cussions of implementing a God-centred approach to the jobs (Cardone 2009, p. 103). business management and operations, they also describe how a faith-based approach helps manage diicult issues. This illustrates the level of respect of management for the Ouimet reports the efforts to reduce redundancy through a entire workforce. Such configuration of faith-led ideas faith-led approach even when economic cycles demand the resembles a distributed form of leadership maintained by

contraction of the workforce. In these circumstances, Ouimet regularly engaging in faith-centred communication. The highlights the importance of human gestures: practices described, namely, the rule of no glass towers and no reserved parking for executives (Hobby Lobby), one- A simple gesture, profoundly human, and this is not to one meetings (Interstate Batteries), and volunteering always easy to do. For example a manager calls a perschemes (Ouimet and Cardone), indicate everyone's impor- son that has been laid of three months earlier to say tance, regardless of their hierarchical level. At Ouimet and hello and get the latest news; or a director decides to Cardone, volunteering in the community promotes authentic invite several dozen people, laid of six months to a communication across levels: year previously for cofee and donuts or for a simple Communication is based on 'being authentic yourself' or greeting others with a real interest, or, even less, out of a desire 'to manipulate people's motivation' just to improve productivity and proitability. Moreover, especially people on the lower rungs of the company, who have a great deal of intuition, are aware of the game and rapidly classify managers in three groups: that form a family business, including the personal, cul- 'straight shooters', 'manipulators' or 'enigmas'. It is a tural, and economic inluences on the individual mem- good thing too (Ouimet and Semen 2013, p. 19). bers of the family business with founders that integrate Our work demonstrates practices that Finally, proof of inancial and public recognition in each of the organizations is evident. Grounded in the spiritual foundation that underpins the relationship between the members of these organizations, the cases describe ges- tures that reinforce reciprocal behaviour among employ- ees. Beyond the annual proit sharing scheme (present in all cases), these organizations created a number of speciic awards recognizing "good" family practices. For example, Ouimet institutionalized the "Prize of Heart" for "someone who has developed a way of being and acting that communi- cates solidarity, help for others, and human dignity, and who or her work in an exemplary manner" (Ouimet and Semen 2013, p. 19). Cardone also has a number of prizes that highlight family spirit, with the most important being the "Cornerstone Award" that "celebrates the extraordinary character of the Factory Family members whose words and actions are the foundation of Cardone's objectives and val- ues" (Cardone 2009, p. 59). Such mechanisms highlight a So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but approach that leads all members of the organi- zation to feeling connected. the household of God, built upon the foundation of The Ownership Subsystem as the cornerstone (NRSV, Ephesians 2: 19-20) The extended family network draws on the close ties interesting insight is how faith-led family businesses between family members but also creates a structure in interpret ownership over time. We assumed that a faith- based approach to family business would lead to a diferent approach to the legal ownership of such irms. Yet, all auto- biographies demonstrate no inluence of religious values on the ownership structures. Despite the evidence suggesting

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that they have a novel and in-depth way of engaging with employees at all levels, the ownership structures remained strictly linked to the family throughout the period analysed. For example, Ouimet passed the company to his three sons, Green and his wife passed Hobby Lobby to their sons and daughters, Cardone Sr. passed the baton to Cardone Jr. who has engaged his own children and respective families in the development of the organization, Norm Miller engaged his son, Scott, who thereafter became CEO as soon as he had the appropriate experience. Such a progressive ownership structure is in line with the reported findings on family business ownership. We found no evidence of ownership distributed among members of the extended spiritual family in the autobiographies we examined.

stewards of a family business. This insight complements current understanding of stewardship (Davis et al. 2010) focused more on the role of blood links between family members within family business. By drawing on the effect that the individual's conception of his/her relationship with God has on the family business subsystems, it also extends knowledge on the open-systems perspective on family business. openly Christian family firms are more interested in Logically, this faith-led family perspective in the organization changes not only how stewardship emerges, but also how it transforms the organization over time. Indeed, the faith-led open-systems analysis enables us to show what this transformation looks like. In essence, each element functions in support of the other elements to ensure the stability and growth of the whole system grounded in Christian values, creating a dynamic collectivistic perspective (Hofstede 1984; Pieper and Klein 2007, p. 305) typical of stewardship. We show that the development of multiple dimensions of stewardship and their effect on organizational practices is and the underpinning organizational approaches emerge

tion, key components of stewardship in family business (Neubaum et al. 2017). We show here that it is through their relationship with God that faith-led practices emerge and stewardship occurs and gains form over time. Our sub-systems analysis supports the view that,

The values, intentions, motivations and skills of the individual determine the actions and behaviours of the development of the organization, Norm Miller engaged his son, Scott, who thereafter became CEO as soon as he had the appropriate experience. Such a progressive ownership structure is in line with the reported findings on family business ownership. We found no evidence of ownership distributed among members of the extended spiritual family in the autobiographies we examined.

Leaders are therefore able to transform organizational practices with an understanding of what God expects from them as part of an extended spiritual family and as stewards of a family business. This insight complements current understanding of stewardship (Davis et al. 2010) focused more on the role of blood links between family members within family business. By drawing on the effect that the individual's conception of his/her relationship with God has on the family business subsystems, it also extends knowledge on the open-systems perspective on family business. openly Christian family firms are more interested in Logically, this faith-led family perspective in the organization changes not only how stewardship emerges, but also how it transforms the organization over time. Indeed, the faith-led open-systems analysis enables us to show what this transformation looks like. In essence, each element functions in support of the other elements to ensure the stability and growth of the whole system grounded in Christian values, creating a dynamic collectivistic perspective (Hofstede 1984; Pieper and Klein 2007, p. 305) typical of stewardship. We show that the development of multiple dimensions of stewardship and their effect on organizational practices is and the underpinning organizational approaches emerge

values and behaviours. The idea that stewardship can emerge from faith extends previous stewardship studies in the psychology or sociology domains (Henssen et al. 2014; Hernandez 2012; Wade-Benzoni et al. 2008). Our work shows several links between Christianity and theoretical perspectives that need further attention. For example, future research might examine to what extent addressing the socioeconomic concerns of the communities they operate in compared to their own financial concerns (Dodd and Dyck 2015). Future research could also assess how (whether) Christian denominations (e.g. Catholic or Anglican) around the world (e.g. Africa, Asia, Latin America) influence family business systems. Moreover, non-family and family members' approach to the survival of Christian family firms (Tomhave and Vopat 2018) might be further examined through comparing the agency and stewardship perspectives (Le Breton-Miller and Miller 2018). rooted in a personal relationship with God. Thus, collectivistic

Conclusion

from faith. Whilst the stewardship literature has linked collectivism with the values held by leaders (Hernandez 2008; Le Breton-Miller and Miller 2009), our work explicitly demonstrates that faith-led values influence organizational and leadership practices. Overall, this also suggests that the religious beliefs in the organizational practices and diffusion of stewardship based on faith-led organizational practices have greater repercussions than previously thought (Steingard 2005; Tracey 2012). The open-systems analysis also unveiled practices that related work within family businesses (Holt et al. 2018) and substantial involvement, distributed forms of presenting a faith-led understanding of stewardship based on power, and low power distance, which are also commonly on the accounts of religious business leaders, it enriches the

How do faith-led practices in family firms affect organizational stewardship? This study reveals that stewardship in faith-led family firms originates from the founder/leader's personal relationship with God, shaping the development and diffusion of stewardship based on faith-led organizational practices in family businesses. Our research is both timely and novel. By responding to calls for more spiritual-related work within family businesses (Holt et al. 2018) and illustrate power, and low power distance, which are also commonly on the accounts of religious business leaders, it enriches the

associated with stewardship (Neubaum et al. 2017). This is theoretical dialogue on the relevance of religion in family especially evident in how these organizations reciprocally business (Le Breton-Miller and Miller 2018). Further studies communicate with members, distribute responsibilities, and of autobiographies in diverse contexts might provide a more employ a serving logic across hierarchical levels. In turn, nuanced understanding of the integration of faith in family this creates an environment in which workers function as businesses around the world (Gupta and Levenburg 2010).

stewards at their own level. Our data suggest that faith-led
practices not only shape the way stewardship develops,
but also support the emergence of new stewards across the

Compliance with Ethical Standards

organization. Whilst previous research has linked the emergence of stewards to a collective and aligned desire for success (Eddleston and Kellermanns 2007), we observe that the way faith is shared across the organization influences the way stewards emerge and remain committed to the organization, regardless of their family or non-family membership. Overall, we add to the stewardship literature by revealing how faith influences the emergence and development of stewardship in family businesses. Stewardship has been

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- conceptualized in previous studies as deriving from the emotional connection between the family business leader and other family members (Davis et al. 2010), but our analysis shows that stewardship can also be embedded in faith-led
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